

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Inspiring futures

Richard Deverell



Tell us about your job

I am the Director of RBG Kew. This involves me working with people throughout the organisation to set our overall strategy and to ensure we have the right investments and processes in place to deliver this. Most importantly I try to ensure we have really outstanding people at Kew who feel properly supported and rewarded.

Why is science important in your career?

Science has always been incredibly important to me. I believe deeply in the scientific method – i.e. revealing truths about the world around us and making decisions based on evidence. I love the curiosity that drives scientists and I believe that science will help us solve some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity today. Finally – I have a very deep love of nature.

What is your average work day like?

Hugely varied! There is no typical day – and that's one of the things I love most about my job. Increasingly I am trying to look outwards more than inwards – i.e. being an advocate for RBG Kew, building our profile and engaging current and future supporters of Kew and its work, whether in government, other scientific organisations or philanthropists.

Did you go to university? If so, what did you study? If not, what did you do after leaving school?

Yes, I studied Natural Sciences (molecular biology) at Cambridge. I was the first person at my school to get into Cambridge. I learned it was possible to confound low expectations.

What sort of personality traits do you have that help you in your career?

I am curious about the world and how it is changing. I put great faith in people and do my best to support them. I am restless and want Kew to be excellent in all that it does. I am energetic, determined and resilient. I hate intolerance, laziness and lack of compassion.

What helped you get your role at Kew?

A number of things came together. I had been a Trustee for 6 years so I knew Kew and Kew knew me. I had worked at the BBC for 20 years, an organisation whose values and culture are similar to Kew's. Finally, the Chairman was willing to consider, for the first time, 'a non-scientist' in the role of Director. Although, of course, I am not a professional scientist, having an undergraduate degree in science helped.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career like yours?

Remember, you are likely to work for a very long time, so it's hugely important to find something that you find interesting and rewarding. Be determined. I have been rejected for many jobs over the years; tenacity really matters. And be receptive to moments of luck. Don't reject a good opportunity simply because it is not perfect – take every chance you are offered so long as the overall trajectory feels right to you.

What do you want people to know about your work?

Kew is a hugely interesting place to work and what Kew does really matters – and will be ever more important given the challenges humanity faces in the 21st century.

Want a career that grows?

Build your skills in science, technology, engineering, art and maths to give yourself a chance to blossom in a career like one of these varied and exciting jobs at Kew.

You could make a real difference to the world.

For further information: www.kew.org